

Message Text

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EXDIS FOR AMB. YOUNG FROM UNA

FOLLOWING REPEAT OF BEIRUT 4946 SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO DAMASCUS
TEL AVIV JERUSALEM AUG 25.

QUOTE: S E C R E T BEIRUT 4946

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT MOPS LE SY

SUBJ: LEBANON'S SYRIAN PRESENCE

REF: STATE 215078

1. HERewith ADDITIONAL COMMENTS AS REQUESTED IN REFTel.
We DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THERE IS YET A STATE OF LOWERED
TENSION IN BEIRUT. WHAT HAS HAPPENED IS THAT THE SYRIAN
ARTILLERY BOMBARDMENT HAS BEEN STOPPED SINCE AUGUST 10
AND THE PORT HAS STARTED OPENING AT A GREATLY REDUCED
RATE UNDER ONLY OCCASIONAL FIRE, BUT THAT AN IMPASSE HAS
ALREADY DEVELOPED IN THE NEGOTIATIONS AND ARRANGEMENTS

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FOR DISENGAGEMENT, AND MACHINE-GUN AND SNIPER FIRING
CONTINUES. WHEN THE BEIRUT PRESS SPEAKS OF "RELATIVELY
CALM" NOWADAYS, IT MEANS THERE WERE NO MAJOR BOMBARD-
MENTS AND ONLY A FEW PEOPLE WERE KILLED OR WOUNDED ON
THE STREETS THE DAY BEFORE. MEANWHILE TENSION
CONTINUES AS EACH SIDE WATCHES THE OTHER CONTINUE TO
MANEUVER FOR POSITION AND BRING IN MORE ARMS.

SHOULD BE NOTED THAT EVERY TIME WE ARE INFORMED THAT "A NEW AGREEMENT" HAS BEEN REACHED BETWEEN THE PARTIES, WITHIN A DAY WE RECEIVE COMPLETELY CONTRADICTORY VERSIONS FROM EACH OF THE PARTIES AS TO WHAT HAD SUPPOSEDLY BEEN AGREED TO. BEIRUT 4898 ON OUR BRIEFING AUG. 23 FROM ADF COMMANDER KHATIB SHOULD ALSO SUPPLY FURTHER GRIST FOR THE DEPARTMENT'S MILL.

2. RE REPORTS (PARA 3 REFTEL) THAT THE ISRAELIS HAVE TOLD TH CHRISTIAN MILITIAS TO KEEP THE LID ON UNTIL THE CAMP DAVID MEETING, WE TOO ARE APPREHENSIVE. SUCH REPORTS WOULD IMPLY THAT IF THERE IS NO SETTLEMENT FAVORABLE TO THE ISRAELI OR CHRISTIAN MILITIAS AT CAMP DAVID, THE ISRAELIS COULD GIVE THEM THE GREEN LIGHT TO BLOW THE LID OFF THEN. IF THERE IS ANY BASIS TO THESE REPORTS, WE CAN ONLY HOPE THAT THE NEGOTIATIONS AT CAMP DAVID COULD BE PROLONGED AS LONG AS POSSIBLE.

3. WITH REGARD TO DRAPER'S LAST CONVERSATION WITH SYRIAN CHARGE (REFTEL PARA 4 AND STATE 215059) WE WONDER WHETHER THE LACK OF THE LATTER'S NEGATIVE RESPONSE TO DRAPER'S ADVOCACY OF DISENGAGEMENT REALLY REFLECTS A CHANGE IN SYRIAN POLICY. WE QUESTION HOW REPRESENTATIVE SUCH SYRIANS ARE OF SYRIAN HIGH POLICY. WE THINK IT QUITE LIKELY THAT DRAPER SIMPLY OVERPOWERED HIM BY ELOQUENCE AND TEMPORARILY WORE HIM OUT.

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4. MEANWHILE, WE NOW DO HAVE A POTENTIALLY PROMISING DEVELOPMENT IN DAMASCUS IN THE FORM OF THE TREND TO TRY TO EXPLAIN SYRIA'S POSITION TO THE WEST (DAMASCUS 4935). HOWEVER, IN VIEW OF THE GENERALLY LOW CALIBRE OF SYRIAN DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATION ABROAD (IN LONDON, FOR EXAMPLE, OLD BUREAUCRATIC HACKS, BAATTI APPARATCHIKS, AND BOMB-THROWERS WHO BLOW THEMSELVES UP), WE TEND TO AGREE FOR OUR OWN PRACTICAL REASONS WITH THE FACTION OF THE BAATHIS WHO SAY THAT THE WORLD MUST COME TO THEM TO FIND OUT SYRIA'S POSITION. WHILE WE WOULD STILL LIKE TO ESTABLISH DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE MYSTERIOUS SYRIAN COMMANDER IN LEBANON (IF INDEED HE EXISTS IN HUMAN FORM), WE THINK THE BEST PLACE TO ARGUE POLICY ON LEBANON WITH THE SYRIANS IS DAMASCUS RATHER THAN WASHINGTON OR ELSEWHERE.

5. ACCORDINGLY, I HAVE THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATION TO PROPOSE: THAT AFTER AMBASSADOR PARKER RETURNS FROM LEAVE (ETA THE END OF AUGUST) AND HAS HAD THE LABOR DAY WEEKEND TO CATCH UP ON DEVELOPMENTS HERE AND IN THE DEPT., HE BE AUTHORIZED TO GO OVER TO DAMASCUS

FOR A DAY OR TWO'S CONSULTATION AND BE AVAILABLE FOR AMBASSADOR SEELYE TO TAKE HIM TO CALL ON SUCH INFLUENTIAL, RECEPTIVE, OR POLICY-MAKING SYRIANS AS THE LATTER CONSIDERS APPROPRIATE. IN SUCH A CALL, WHILE LEAVING EXPOSITION OF U.S. POLICY TO AMBASSADOR SEELYE, AMBASSADOR PARKER COULD GIVE THE SYRIAN HIGH COMMAND A PERSPECTIVE OF THE SYRIAN POSTURE IN BEIRUT, AS SEEN BY SUCH AN EXPERIENCED WESTERN AMBASSADOR HERE, ON THE SAME BASIS AS HE WOULD IF HE HAD A SYRIAN AMBASSADOR OR PRO-CONSUL IN BEIRUT TO DEAL WITH. IN THE PROCESS OF SUCH A DISCUSSION, AMBASSADOR PARKER, WHO FROM HIS RESIDENCE WAS FIRST-HAND WITNESS OF MOST OF THE RECENT MAJOR SYRIAN ARTILLERY BOMBARDMENTS OF EAST BEIRUT, MIGHT BY HIS GRAPHIC PERSONAL DESCRIPTIONS
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BE ABLE TO GET ACROSS TO THE SYRIAN HIGH COMMAND THAT, ALTHOUGH EVERYONE KNOWS THAT THE SYRIAN FORCES HAVE BEEN DELIBERATELY PROVOKED BY THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS HERE, THE SYRIAN RESPONSE WAS NOT MERELY DISPROPORTIONATE; IT WAS SO UNDISCRIMINATING AS TO BE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE EVEN MILITARILY, SINCE THE VICTIMS WERE NOT THE ACTUAL MILITIA CULPRITS BUT TO A LARGE DEGREE MERELY THOSE HAPLESS CHRISTIAN CIVILIANS IN EAST BEIRUT WHO ARE TOO POOR TO FLEE FROM THE AREA OR CONVERT THEIR HOMES INTO BUNKERS. THEY NOW OPPOSE THE SYRIANS MORE THAN EVER. WE HAVE GREAT DOUBTS AS TO WHETHER GOL OFFICIALS OR SYRIAN OFFICERS ARE TELLING THIS STORY LIKE IT IS TO THE SYRIAN TOP COMMAND. THEREFORE THE LATTER APPARENTLY DOES NOT REALIZE THE EXTENT TO WHICH IT IS PLAYING INTO THE HANDS OF THE CHRISTIAN EXTREMISTS AND THE FALLACY OF TRYING TO INCITE THE EAST BEIRUT CIVILIANS AGAINST THE MILITIAS BY SHOOTING THEM.

6. I DISCUSSED THIS PROPOSAL WITH AMBASSADOR PARKER JUST BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE ON LEAVE, AND HE AGREED THAT I SHOULD SOUND OUT EMBASSY DAMASCUS AND THE DEPARTMENT ON IT.

7. IN THE PROCESS OF TRYING TO WORK OUT A DISENGAGEMENT WE MUST GUARD AGAINST LETTING THE SYRIANS OR ANYONE ELSE, ESPECIALLY THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS, GET THE IMPRESSION THAT THE USG WOULD NOT REALLY MIND SO MUCH IF THE PHALANGIST AND CHAMOUNIST MILITIAS CONTINUE TO PICK OFF THREE OR FOUR WRETCHED SYRIAN ARMY CONSCRIPTS A DAY IN BEIRUT SO LONG AS THE SYRIAN ARTILLERY DOES NOT RETALIATE BY BOMBARDING EAST BEIRUT AGAIN. IN ADDITION TO CONTINUING TO TAKE A FIRM LINE FOR THE RECORD WITH THE SYRIAN EMBASSY, WE BELIEVE THE
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DEPARTMENT MUST TAKE AN EQUALLY FIRM LINE WITH THE
AMERICAN LEBANESE LOBBY AND ITS SUPPORTERS. WHILE
CHARLES MALIK SHOULD OF COURSE BE RECEIVED IN THE
DEPARTMENT FOR OLD TIMES' SAKE, WE BELIEVE DRAPER
SHOULD TALK TO HIM VERY TOUGHLY INDEED AND ASK HIM
IF HE DOES NOT THINK IT A DISGRACE THAT A FORMER
EMINENT PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY SHOULD NOW BE STOOPING
TO THE INCITING ROLE HE IS PLAYING A A CIVIL WAR
FUELED TO LARGE DEGREE BY RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE.
KINSOLVING
UNQUOTE CHRISTOPHER

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